

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00

SAJ-01 /060 W

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R 241719Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2961

INFO ZEN AMCONSUL FLORENCE 1723

ZEN AMCONSUL MILAN 4001

AMCONSUL NAPLES

AMCONSUL GENOA

AMCONSUL PALERMO

AMCONSUL TRIESTE

AMCONSUL TURIN

DIA

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN, GERMANY

SHAPEUSNR

USMISSION NATO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, IT

SUBJECT: INITIATIVES TO PERMIT ABSENTEE VOTING GAIN MOMENTUM

SUMMARY: A PERENNIAL ISSUE, THE ENFRANCHISEMENT OF OVERSEAS ITALIANS, HAS ONCE AGAIN SURFACED, HAVING RECEIVED WIDE PUBLICITY FROM A SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVE TO COLLECT SUFFICIENT SIGNATURES FOR PRESENTATION OF A DRAFT "POPULAR INITIATIVE" LAW. THIS TIME, SOME POSITIVE ACTION ON THE DRAFT LEGISLATION MAY OCCUR, SINCE THE NON-COMMUNITST PARTIES HAVE NOW CONCLUDED THAT THEY (RATHER THAN THE PCI) WOULD BENEFIT MOST FROM ABSENTEE VOTING. WE ARE TOLD THE GOVERNMENT MAY SOON INTRODUCE ITS OWN DRAFT BILL. IF ENACTED (THE PCI LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STANCE HAS SO FAR BEEN CAUTIOUS), THE PRACTICAL EFFECT ON ITALIAN ELECTIONS COULD BE MOMENTOUS. SOME FOUR TO FIVE MILLION OVERSEAS ITALIANS COULD BE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE, REPRESENTING SOME 10 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL ELECTORATE IN THE 1976 NATIONAL POLL. END SUMMARY.

1. A SUCCESSFUL DRIVE BY THE ITALIAN ALPINIST ASSOCIA-

TION (A VETERAN'S ASSOCIATION) TO COLLECT THE 50,000 SIGNATURES REQUIRED BY THE CONSTITUTION TO INTRODUCE A DRAFT "POPULAR INITIATIVE" LAW IN PARLIAMENT HAS FOCUSED RENEWED ATTENTION ON THE ISSUE OF PERMITTING ITALIAN CITIZENS RESIDENT ABROAD TO VOTE. THE ALPINISTS (ANA) BEGAN THEIR CAMPAIGN JAN. 13 AND, SUPPORTED BY THE CONSERVATIVE PRESS (IL GIORNALE, IL TEMPO AND THE WEEKLY IL SETTIMANALE), SUCCEEDED IN OBTAINING OVER 200,000 SIGNATURES BY THE FEB. 20 DEADLINE. THE DRAFT LAW AND SIGNATURES MUST BE PRESENTED TO EITHER CHAMBER OF PARLIAMENT BY APRIL

5. OVER THE LAST 25 YEARS, 22 SIMILAR INITIATIVES WERE PIGEONHOLED (A DRAFT POPULAR INITIATIVE LAW CAN BE EASILY KILLED SIMPLY BY NOT PLACING IT ON THE PARLIAMENTARY AGENDA).

2. THIS TIME, A POSITIVE REAPPRAISAL OF THE POLITICAL ADVANTAGES OF ABSENTEE VOTING BY THE DC AND THE LAY PARTIES AUGURS WELL FOR SOME FORWARD MOVEMENT ON THIS LONG-STANDING ISSUE. THE ALPINIST PROPOSAL IS CONSIDERED FLAWED SINCE IT WOULD REQUIRE CITIZENS TO VOTE IN PERSON AT ITALIAN CONSULATES. IN PLACES LIKE BUENOS AIRES, WHERE SOME 700,000 ELIGIBLE VOTERS RESIDE, DIRECT VOTING WOULD BE LOGISTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE. MOREOVER, SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND ITALIANS LIVING TOO FAR FROM CONSULATES WOULD BE UNABLE TO VOTE. THE ANA INITIATIVE HAS SERVED TO PUBLICIZE THE ISSUE, INCREASING PUBLIC PRESSURE ON THE PARTIES TO DEAL WITH THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PROBLEM IN SOME FASHION.

3. TWO PROPOSALS (ONE DC AND THE OTHER A JOINT DC/PRI/PLI/PSDI/PSI INITIATIVE) ARE ALREADY BEFORE PARLIAMENT. THE DC PROPOSAL (BIANCO-SCALIA) WOULD PERMIT ABSENTEE VOTING BY MAIL TO ALL HOLDERS OF ITALIAN PASSPORTS. MORE IMPORTANTLY, AN MFA SOURCE HAS TOLD US THAT THE GOVERNMENT MAY SOON INTRODUCE ITS OWN DRAFT LAW, THE PRODUCT OF AN INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE CHAIRED BY MFA UNDERSECRETARY RADI.

4. IN THE PAST, MUCH OF THE RESISTANCE TO ABSENTEE VOTING WAS BASED ON FEARS THAT THE PCI WOULD BENEFIT MOST FROM THE OVERSEAS WORKER VOTE. THE LARGE ITALIAN POPULATION IN NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA WAS OVERLOOKED, ALTHOUGH THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THESE CAN BE EXPECTED TO VOTE NON-COMMUNIST. SOME SOURCES ESTIMATE THAT 3.5 OF THE ESTIMATED 5 MILLION ANTICIPATED ABSENTEE VOTERS WOULD CAST NON-COMMUNIST BALLOTS. THE MFA SOURCE ALSO

POINTED OUT THAT THE PCI ALREADY REALIZES A LARGE SHARE OF THE ABSENTEE VOTE, SINCE THE PARTY FACILITATES THE RETURN OF PCI VOTING WORKERS TO ITALY FOR IMPORTANT ELECTIONS.

5. UNDOUBTEDLY HAVING REACHED THE SAME CONCLUSIONS AS THE DC, THE PCI POSITION HAS BEEN CAUTIOUS. IN A RECENT INTERVIEW, PCI SPOKESMAN PAJETTA ACCEPTED THE PRINCIPLE THAT OVERSEAS ITALIANS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO VOTE, BUT HE RAISED A HOST OF TECHNICAL AND LEGAL DIFFICULTIES MAKING ABSENTEE VOTING IMPOSSIBLE IN PRACTICE. A PCI FLYER REPORTEDLY DISTRIBUTED IN THE BENELUX EXPLICITLY REJECTS ABSENTEE VOTING AS THE MACHINATIONS OF "SQUALID POLITICIANS," ALLEGING THAT REGIMES IN SOUTH AMERICA AND THE USA WOULD NOT ALLOW ANYONE TO VOTE FOR LEFTIST PARTIES.

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6. COMMENT: SINCE THE NON-COMMUNIST PARTIES NOW SEE CLEAR ADVANTAGES TO ENFRANCHISING THE OVERSEAS ITALIAN, SOME FORWARD MOVEMENT ON THE PROPOSALS CAN BE EXPECTED. THE PLANNED 1978 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WILL BE USED TO ADVANCE THE PROPOSAL ON THE THEORY THAT IT IS ILLOGICAL AND UN-EUROPEAN NOT TO PERMIT AN ITALIAN WORKER IN DUSSELDORF TO VOTE A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION. THE PCI CAN HARDLY TAKE A NEGATIVE ATTITUDE, BUT IT CAN BE EXPECTED TO STALL BY RAISING THE NUMERIOUS TECHNICAL AND LEGAL OBSTACLES THAT DO IN FACT EXIST. THE STAKES, HOWEVER, ARE INDEED LARGE. WITH 4-5 MILLION VOTES AT ISSUE, REPRESENTING 10 PERCENT OF THE VOTING ELECTORATE, THE EFFECT OF ABSENTEE VOTING ON FUTURE ITALIAN ELECTIONS COULD HAVE DECISIVE SIGNIFICANCE.BEAUDRY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Channel Indicators: n/a
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
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Subject: INITIATIVES TO PERMIT ABSENTEE VOTING GAIN MOMENTUM SUMMARY: A PERENNIAL ISSUE, THE ENFRANCHISEMENT OF OVERSEAS ITALIANS, HAS ONCE AGAIN SURFACED, HAVING RECEIVED
TAGS: PINT, IT
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8961c1bf-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
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